

CATHOLIC MARRIAGES

To the Editor.

Sir,—I have just finished reading my copy of the pamphlet on Catholic Marriages and I take the liberty, as a layman, of respectfully endorsing the verdict expressed by Father Coffey regarding it as 'a very able and excellent exposition of the Catholic position.' With his usual ingenuity Father Cleary has contrived to introduce into his work something to meet all tastes. For the young people who meditate 'committing' matrimony, and are not in a frame of mind to go very deeply into anything, but who want to know exactly where they stand and what is required of them, there is the plain, full text of the Pope's decree, and clear, popular explanations of it by the Victorian Bishops and by his Lordship the Right Rev. Dr. Grimes. For those of a more combative disposition, who dearly love to follow the cut and thrust of an intellectual tussle, there is the keenly interesting controversy reprinted from the Christchurch papers. While for those who like to go deeply into things and to get right down to bed-rock on any subject which they take in hand, there is an appeal to first principles, and an exhaustive exposition of the whole question in all its bearings—Scriptural, historical, and philosophical—by the author himself. In addition there are a large number of crisp, pithy notes on a hundred and one minor but important points; so that altogether, for the laity, the work is a regular 'vade mecum' on the Catholic Marriage question.

Regarding the special controversy which gave rise to the publication of the pamphlet little need now be said, as the letters—reproduced in full on both sides—speak sufficiently for themselves. I happened to be in Christchurch while the discussion was in progress, and there was but one opinion as to the utter failure of the anti-Catholic assailant to make good his position or to score even a single point. And this was not only the view of the man in the street, professional men—journalists and legal gentlemen—with whom I came in contact expressed themselves also as emphatically of the opinion that the Rev. Mr. Carrington had been hopelessly outclassed. I believe that personally that gentleman is a very estimable man, and by this time he no doubt deeply regrets that in a moment of foolishness he should have been betrayed into placing himself in such an utterly false position.

The root cause of any difficulty which non-Catholics may have in understanding how an authoritative ecclesiastical utterance can have power to bind the consciences of men is to be found in their altogether inadequate conception of the sublime dignity of the Church of God. Even the Rev. Mr. Carrington—an ordained minister of the 'High Church' school—evidently regards the Church as little more than a human organisation for the dissemination of certain fixed theological truths. That it was originally founded, in some sense, by God, he would no doubt admit; but in his view the Founder is apparently a sort of absentee God, who, having set the machine going, is content now to sit apart and watch it work. The real truth is, of course, that besides being a 'kingdom,' 'city,' 'fold,' etc.—all of which imply more or less the existence of an active supreme authority—the Church is the very 'Body' of Christ, the continuation (as it were) of the Incarnation, a sort of Moral Personality indwelt by the Holy Spirit. 'It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us' were the sublime words with which the Church in the days of the Apostles at the Council of Jerusalem introduced her first decree to the world. 'It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us'—the precise equivalent of 'in the sight of God and of His Church' which was such a rock of offence to the Rev. Mr. Carrington. The promise is the same for the Church of the twentieth century as it was for that of the first century; and it is because the Catholic Church claims this assurance that her pronouncements carry such weight, that her children welcome them with loving obedience, and they look to her not as to a mere human organisation but as to a sure and unerring guide, a helm in the storm of life, a pilot who can confidently set the course. As I have said, this is the fact which it is essential to insist on in explaining the decree to non-Catholics, and the pages devoted to the exposition and vindication of the high mission and authority of the Church are, in my judgment, among the most weighty and valuable in the whole work.

An incidental but noteworthy feature of 'Catholic Marriages'—and one which readers will recognise as characteristic of the author's method—is the vast amount of historical references and information which it contains. In Christchurch, the legal cases cited and

the unimpeachably accurate disquisition on the exact status of the Church of England and her relation to the secular courts came as an eye-opener even to the legal fraternity themselves. A further example of the immense amount of research that has been expended in the preparation of this publication will be found in the final chapter dealing with the history of invalidating (marriage) legislation in the Jewish Church. Here Father Cleary has broken entirely new ground; and in order to get the information there contained in brief and handy compass the average man would have to go very far afield—and then, if I may be allowed a mild Hibernianism, he wouldn't get it.

In due time, no doubt, a copious literature will spring up round the recent decree, but as yet, with the exception of the publication under notice, no volume has been published which takes this question back to its very foundations; and this, while it has made the author's task much more difficult, has made the present value of his work all the greater. 'Catholic Marriages' has the special distinction, and is entitled to the special advantage, of being first in the field.

A word of praise is due for the very excellent index attached to the work. I have tested it very fully and have never found it fail.

Wishing this little manual the wide circulation it undoubtedly deserves, I am, etc.,

J. A. SCOTT.

May 11.

OBITUARY

Mrs. SAVAGE, MASTERTON.

The many friends of Mr. C. H. Savage, of Masterton, (writes a correspondent) will learn with regret of the death of his wife, which occurred on April 4. The deceased, who was greatly respected by a large circle of friends, was born fifty-four years ago at Ardferd Co. Kerry, and was a member of a well-known family named Ryall. She was attended in her illness by the Rev. Father Kelly. The funeral cortege was a lengthy one. She leaves a husband and daughter to mourn their loss.—R.I.P.

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